

## **KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

### **STAFF NOTE**

#### **Review Item:**

Closing achievement gaps in Kentucky's schools and Proposed Plan for closing the achievement gap for students with disabilities

#### **Applicable Statute(s) or Regulations(s):**

SB 168, KRS 158.649, KRS 160.345(3)

#### **History / Background:**

***Existing Policy.*** In October 2000, the Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) received a report from the Minority Student Achievement Task Force convened by the Commissioner in March 2000 that included a set of actions with timelines for improving the performance of minority students in Kentucky. Out of these recommendations, partnership sites were identified to work on school and district-specific strategies and activities to reduce achievement gaps for minority students. In 2002, HB 168 required the provision of data to schools and districts disaggregated by race, gender, disability, English proficiency, and participation in the free and reduced lunch program and required the setting of targets and the development of plans to eliminate achievement gaps within each school. Since that time, KDE provided disaggregated data and technical assistance to local schools and districts to assist them in gap reduction efforts, and attempted to identify additional means to provide assistance in local efforts.

In spring 2003, the congruence of several events caused the creation of positions for five regional Achievement Gap Coordinators (AGCs) for the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE). At the same time the Kentucky Board of Education's (KBE's) goals and priorities focused on reducing gaps in student achievement, legislative provisions cited above and federal mandates (No Child Left Behind) that were passed addressing these critical issues. Juxtaposed to these events was the elimination of KDE's primary presence in the field – eight Regional Service Centers (RSCs), each with ten or more employees. Accepting the challenges presented by these events and based on the goals, objectives, and priorities of the Kentucky Board of Education, the KDE carefully defined the parameters for field-based services of the AGCs.

#### **The Work of Achievement Gap Coordinators:**

The Achievement Gap Coordinators were first given the charge to design their work according to the needs expressed by district and external partners within the overarching goal of facilitating the efforts of districts and schools to eliminate achievement gaps and build capacity for whole-school improvement. Serving as a communication link from KDE to the field in regard to KBE priorities, KDE programs, practices, strategies, and issues was included as an important function of the AGC position. Providing a vehicle for the field to speak in return to KDE was also an essential component of their work.

Networks – new and existing ones – for education stakeholders were to be developed and/or nurtured within each gap area. Cadres of teacher leaders, cohorts of principals, councils of district instructional support personnel, and others were either started or supported through the encouragement of partnerships with educational cooperatives, special education cooperatives, Prichard Committee/Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership (CIPL) and others. At these networking sessions, gap coordinators shared high-quality professional development and successful strategies for eliminating gaps from other schools and districts.

Assisting schools and districts in targeted, long-term planning has been an on-going responsibility for AGCs. The entire process, including conducting comprehensive needs assessments; the collection, management and prioritization of data; and analysis of results for their root causes and contributing factors continues to be an arduous task for schools and districts, and one where AGCs have assisted in large group and individual settings. Following the identification of needs, schools and districts have called upon AGCs to recommend research-based practices to eliminate the causes of achievement gaps and to reduce barriers to learning. Consequently, with a limited number of coordinators, a key responsibility has been brokering appropriate professional development, materials, research or practice from other partners, individuals and groups upon request. Maintaining data bases of providers and practitioners has given schools and districts additional resources on which to call for practical assistance.

### **Achievement Gap Initiatives:**

Grounded in findings from Scholastic Audits and Reviews, identification of achievement gaps for specific areas, existing needs assessments of the former RSCs, and survey data from superintendents and schools through educational cooperatives and other external partners, coordinators focused their work on several priority needs: planning, culture, leadership, data analysis, and strategies to address / close specific achievement gaps.

In the ensuing 20 months, the AGCs (as a group and individually) have designed training for and implemented two major initiatives to meet needs. In October 2003, with the Educational Leadership Development Collaborative, they coordinated one pilot and eleven regional sessions for “The Next Generation of School Improvement: Closing the Achievement Gap Through a Continuous Planning Process.” The overwhelming consensus of stakeholders throughout the Commonwealth was an emphasis on improving school culture and leadership. The second initiative, implemented in October 2004, was the Guided Self-Study – an abbreviated process using the Standards and Indicators for School Improvement to assist a school in self-examination as a means of intentional action toward closing achievement gaps.

A frequent request from schools and districts is one for culture audits or reviews. Unwilling to separate one standard – Standard 4 – from the other eight in the Standards and Indicators for School Improvement (SISI), yet compelled to respond to needs of constituencies, AGCs worked with each other and partners to conduct the reviews or to recommend external resources. In one situation, a district agreed to partner on a case study of its own culture as perceived in its community and its member schools. An AGC in conjunction with a District Support Facilitator (federally supported KDE positions that assist schools in meeting AYP under NCLB)

spearheaded the site work while electronically including all AGCs in the process as the review progressed.

Examples of responses by AGCs to specific district and school needs in regard to gap issues include:

- Tools for monitoring gaps of special needs students on a weekly basis in order to hold schools, school councils and teachers more accountable for individual student learning were collected and distributed to schools in northern Kentucky.
- Working with children of poverty in Southeast and Eastern Kentucky continues to be a focus, and AGCs have responded by forming and facilitating leadership cadres that call for candid discussions of instructional leadership, organizational structure, and high expectations.
- In Western Kentucky, the AGC assists instructional supervisors in networking with schools that have demonstrated success in requested areas. Similar networks in other areas (Eastern, Central and Southeastern) provide access to current research, best practices, problem-solving, and shared experiences.
- AGCs recommend continuous assessment for all schools and districts to provide up-to-date data on student progress and insure that gaps are recognized and addressed throughout the year. Professional development for assessment as a process rather than as an event is frequent and on-going.
- AGCs have provided professional development and follow-up for gap issues in regard to specific instructional strategies, including how boys and girls learn differently, effective classrooms for children of color, teaching children of poverty, middle school strategies, differentiation of instruction, culture, leadership, and high expectations for all. AGCs have provided the forum, facilitated the presentation, or brokered the workshop for closing gaps for children with disabilities and children with limited English proficiency.

In response to the Board's request, attached is a chart (Attachment A) that provides the most current information in terms of the existing achievement gaps in reading and mathematics at the elementary, middle and high school levels as measured by performance on the most recent Kentucky Core Content Test (KCCT).

As a subset of the discussion on the overall achievement gap, the Board's KSB/KSD Committee has been focusing on the special education achievement gap. At the last KBE meeting, a summary of the actions and lessons learned by Johnson County Middle School and North Hardin High School as they worked to close the achievement gap between all students and those with disabilities was reviewed. In addition, the Board received information gathered from visits to and conversations with schools, districts and special education cooperatives across the state. A proposed plan for closing the academic achievement gap for students with disabilities is attached (Attachment B) and will be discussed at the June meeting. The plan includes activities for KBE, KDE, districts and schools.

**Impact on Getting to Proficiency:**

Additional personnel and fiscal resources to support schools and districts, such as the area gap coordinators, are critical in the Department's efforts to reduce achievement gaps among subpopulations and to move schools toward proficiency.

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**Deputy Commissioner**

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**Commissioner of Education****Date:**

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